



The Mitch Report

A newsletter for the Post-Hurricane Reconstruction Project



Costa Rica . Dominican Republic . El Salvador . Guatemala . Haiti . Honduras . Nicaragua

News Flash

From November 19-30, 2001, a two-week module on basic epidemiology was conducted in Moulin-sur-Mer, Haiti. This module was the first of a series of three modules for the "Cours de Formation en Epidémiologie de Terrain" (Field Epidemiology Training Course) planned by the MOH, PAHO and the CDC.

A total of 22 physicians, nurses and statisticians from central and district level, received training on basic epidemiology and biostatistics, as well as an introduction to public health surveillance. Specific issues on epidemiology surveillance in Haiti were also covered. For all but eight of the participants, this was the first training on epidemiology ever received. The other participants had benefited from an epidemiology course given in Haiti about eight years ago. It is expected that all of the participants from the district level will occupy the post of district epidemiologist from now on.

In addition to the participation of the MOH, CDC, and PAHO trainers, the newly appointed TEPHINET Advisor at the WHO/CSR office in Lyon, France, contributed to the training activity, thanks to the financial support of the French Coopération in Haiti. The Cuban cooperation also contributed one trainer during the first week of the module.

All of the participants successfully completed the module. Highlights were the trainees' dynamic and enthusiastic participation during the courses and the case studies examined. Furthermore, their intense and high motivation was reflected by the late-at-night group review sessions spontaneously organized by the trainees themselves.

The third module (Communication and Analytic Epidemiology) for the 1st FETP cohort was held in Costa Rica from November 5-17, 2001. During the communication training the FETP trainees prepared field reports, oral presentations, and article summaries through the use of case studies and their own field projects. The primary purpose of the Analytic Epidemiology training was for trainees to analyze surveillance data (i.e., morbidity, mortality and surveys) by using analytic methods such as linear and logistic regressions, relative risk and odds ratio, standardization of rates, and time series analysis. Epi Info 2000 was used to put all of those methods into practice.

Forty epidemiologists from MINSA have graduated from the Data for Decision Making (DDM) Training Program in Nicaragua, during the first "Conferencia Nacional", carried out in Managua on December 6, 2001.

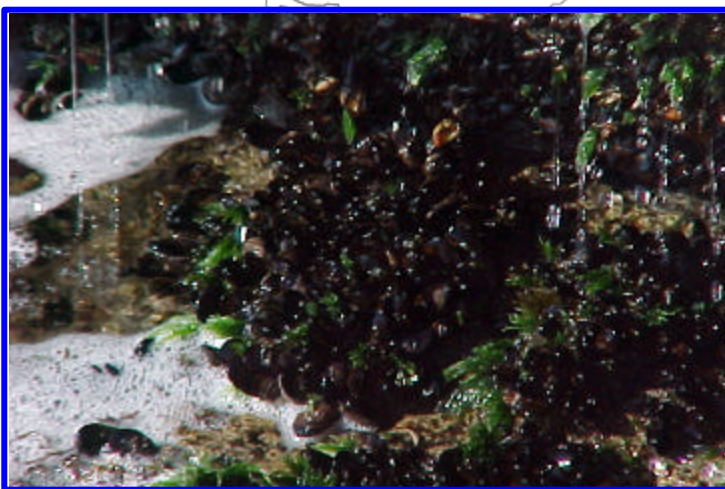
The team of Karen Wilkins and Antonio Gomez (CDC/DIH) worked with the Ministry of Health, CIES and UNAN-Leon to conduct an assessment of the DDM training program in Nicaragua. The first cohort of participants from decentralized areas had just completed the training program and had already begun to put the newly acquired skills to use in their work. This assessment will be repeated in Costa Rica (February 2002), El Salvador and Guatemala to assist program in improving their programs as well as deriving lessons learned for future program design.

The APHL Hurricanes Mitch/Georges Advisory committee is hosting a meeting in Atlantic Beach Florida January 16 and 17th. Participants from the seven Mitch countries will be in attendance. The meeting is to discuss pending activities prior to March 31, evaluations activities, and further develop the sub regional proposal for an APHL type organization in Central America and the Caribbean.

Trainee Investigation

Paralytic shellfish poisoning in El Salvador -- The FETP identifies a situation where strengthening and improvement of public alerts will be needed to prevent disease.

In early November 2002 Dr. Tito Rodriguez, a first year FETP trainee in the La Libertad Department of El Salvador, received reports of 5 patients who developed acute paralysis within a few hours of eating bivalve mollusks. During a preliminary trip to the affected towns and health centers Dr. Rodriguez learned of additional persons who had developed paralysis and other neurologic symptoms and signs typical of paralytic shellfish poisoning shortly after eating bivalve mollusks. These poisonings had occurred despite a well-developed surveillance system that had detected dangerous levels of saxitoxins (up to 30 times higher than the minimum dangerous level) in bivalve mollusks and repeated public warnings along the entire coast of El Salvador. Indeed, an extensive red tide phenomenon had affected the Pacific coast of Central America from August through November of 2001.



To answer the question of why the local population harvested and ate bivalve mollusks despite repeated and diverse warnings Dr. Rodriguez designed and carried out a case control study in the most heavily affected coastal town, Mizata. He found a total of 64 persons (attack rate 11/1000) who developed paralysis and other neurologic symptoms. In some instances the paralysis affected an entire household and family members were too incapacitated to seek medical attention. Fortunately there

were no deaths. He learned that harvesting and eating toxic mussels during the alert was associated with diminishing frequency and intensity of public warning messages during the last month of the alert when toxin levels were at their highest. Affected families had assumed that the alert was over and that it was now safe again to eat mussels (odds ratio 6.8, 95% confidence interval 2.9 – 16). In addition, commercial fishermen in the area had misinformed the locals about the safety of the mussels.

Dr. Rodriguez hopes to prevent future occurrences of paralytic shellfish poisoning by increasing the frequency and clarity of warnings to the public as well as working with the local fishermen and their associations.

Calendar of Events for 2002*

January 18	"Principles of Epidemiology" Final Exam in El Salvador
January 21-25	DDM Training in Nicaragua (1 st Module for 2 nd Cohort)
February	2 nd Module of "Cours de Formation en Epidémiologie de Terrain" in Haiti (dates to be announced)
March 10-22	4 th FETP Module for 1 st Cohort (location: El Salvador)
April	Final Module of "Cours de Formation en Epidémiologie de Terrain" in Haiti (dates to be announced)
April 15-26	2 nd FETP Module for 2 nd Cohort (location: Honduras)
June 2-6	TEPHINET's Global Scientific Conference in Madrid, Spain

*All dates are subject to change

